

President George W. Bush's Message on the Faith-Based and Community Organization Initiative (Excerpts)

*Faith-Based and Community Organization Initiative
(Executive Orders Signed January 29, 2001)
“Rallying the Armies of Compassion”*

America is richly blessed by the diversity and vigor of neighborhood healers: civic, social, charitable, and religious groups. These quiet heroes lift people's lives in ways that are beyond government's know-how, usually on shoestring budgets, and they heal our nation's ills one heart and one act of kindness at a time.

The indispensable and transforming work of faith-based and other charitable service groups must be encouraged. Government cannot be replaced by charities, but it can and should welcome them as partners. We must heed the growing consensus across America that successful government social programs work in fruitful partnership with community-serving and faith-based organizations—whether run by Methodists, Muslims, Mormons, or good people of no faith at all.

The paramount goal must be compassionate results, not compassionate intentions. Federal policy should reject the failed formula of towering, distant bureaucracies that too often prize process over performance. We must be outcome-based, insisting on success and steering resources to the effective and to the inspired. Also, we must always value the bedrock principles of pluralism, nondiscrimination, evenhandedness, and neutrality. Private and charitable groups, including religious ones, should have the fullest opportunity permitted by law to compete on a level playing field, so long as they achieve valid public purposes, like curbing crime, conquering addiction, strengthening families, and overcoming poverty.

In this blueprint, I outline my agenda to enlist, equip, enable, empower, and expand the heroic works of faith-based and community groups across America. The building blocks are two Executive Orders . . . that call for the

creation of a high-level White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and instruct five Cabinet departments to establish Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. . . .

In social policy, the nonprofit sector—secular and religiously affiliated providers, civic groups, foundations, and other grant-givers—has long been a vital and valued partner of government. We honor both nonprofit agencies and government programs. We seek to add to, not take away from, their good work.

We will focus on expanding the role in social services of faith-based and other community-serving groups that have traditionally been distant from government. We do so . . . because they typically have been neglected or excluded in Federal policy. Our aim is equal opportunity for such groups, a level playing field, a fair chance for them to participate when their programs are successful. We will encourage Federal agencies to continue to become more hospitable to grassroots and small-scale programs, both secular and faith-based, because they have unique strengths that government can't duplicate.

Faith-based and grassroots groups that achieve good results should be eligible to compete for Federal funds. And the Federal Government should do more to encourage private giving—from individuals, corporations, foundations, and others—to the armies of compassion that labor daily to strengthen families and communities.

This initiative is . . . designed to make sure that faith-based community-serving groups have a seat at the table. It will eliminate the Federal Government's discrimination against faith-based organizations, while also applauding and aiding secular nonprofit initiatives. It will reach out to grassroots groups without marginalizing established organizations. America has a strong, thriving nonprofit sector. Recent figures indicate that the 1.4 million organizations comprising the independent sector receive over \$621 billion in total annual revenue, representing 6 percent of the national economy. Charities and other nonprofits employ over 10 million individuals, comprising over 7 percent of the American workforce.

Without diminishing the important work of government agencies and the wide range of nonprofit service providers, this initiative will support the unique capacity of local faith-based and other community programs to serve people in need, not just by providing services but also by transforming lives.

Our faith-based and community agenda will be organized around three lines of action:

- ◆ Identifying and eliminating improper Federal barriers to effective faith-based and community-serving programs through legislative, regulatory, and programmatic reforms;

- ◆ Stimulating an outpouring of private giving to nonprofits, faith-based programs, and community groups by expanding tax deductions and through other initiatives; and
- ◆ Pioneering a new model of cooperation through Federal initiatives that expand the involvement of faith-based and community groups in after-school and literacy services, help the children of prisoners, and support other citizens in need.

See www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/faithbased.pdf for the full text of President Bush's message.